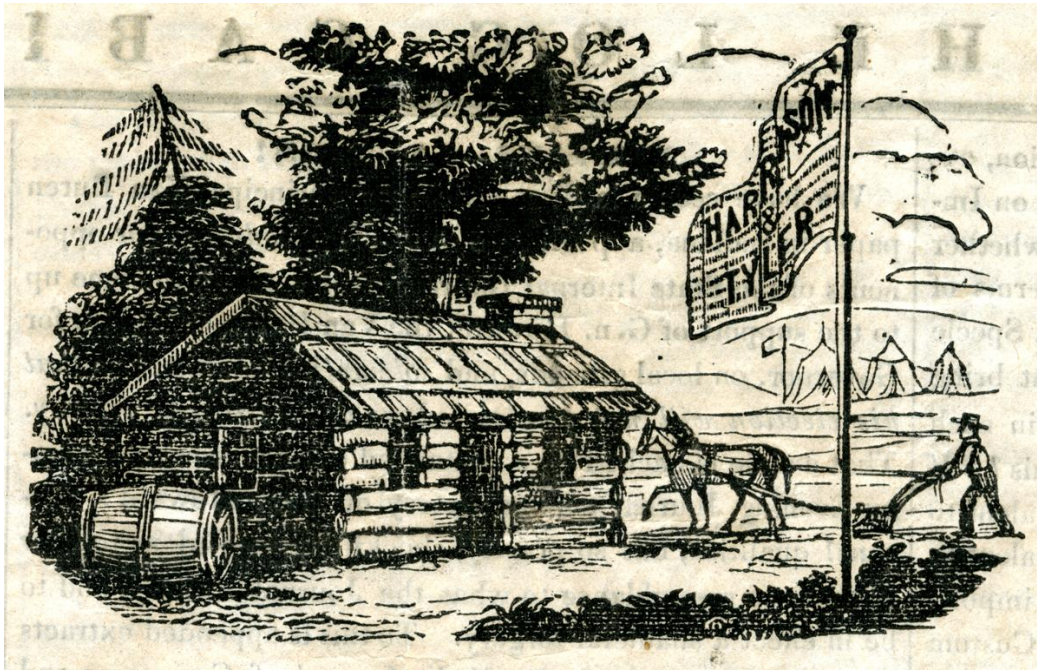


Frontier Democracy



The Log Cabin

Detail from the Whig Party newspaper, July 18, 1840

The expansion of white male suffrage in the 1830s led to an expansive strategy of political imagery that co-opted hatchets, axes, and log cabins as empathetic symbols that could be understood by anyone. The exclusive use of such symbols masked the difficult and contentious positions of rival candidates and partisans who, with a wink and a nod, universally embraced the rough-hewn values of the American frontier.

VOLUME 1 NO. 12

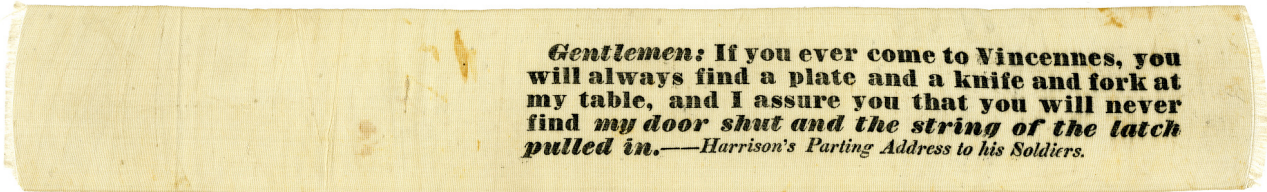
review his work and offered

The Whig campaign of 1840 against incumbent President Martin Van Buren established a pattern of predetermined imagery, from which later campaigns have seldom deviated. The Whigs adopted the symbols of the log cabin and hard

cider to promote the candidacy of General William Henry Harrison. An outpouring of everyday ceramics with designs of log cabins and canes with miniature hard cider barrels for heads soon followed. Whig glassware, spoons, covered dishes, and children's tea sets all declared for log cabins.



Ribbon, General William Henry Harrison

A narrow, light-colored ribbon, possibly made of silk or cotton, with a printed message in black ink. The ribbon is slightly wrinkled and has some small brown spots, suggesting age. The text is centered and reads:

Gentlemen: If you ever come to Vincennes, you will always find a plate and a knife and fork at my table, and I assure you that you will never find my door shut and the string of the latch pulled in.—Harrison's Parting Address to his Soldiers.

Ribbon, William Henry Harrison

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Medal, "The People's Choice in the Year 1840"

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Log cabin lamp, 1876

[View object record </collections/nmah_1691974>](/collections/nmah_1691974)



Blue log cabin patterned dish set

[View object record </collections/nmah_529127>](/collections/nmah_529127)



Pink log cabin patterned dish set

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Designed & Lithogr. by E. Weber & Co. Baltimore.

THE HARD CIDER QUICK STEP

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DELICATES OF THE

GREAT WHIG CONVENTION

Held at Baltimore May 4th 1840

By

I. T. S.

Published by S. CARUST Baltimore.

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Sheet music, "The Hard Cider Quick Step"

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Published & Sold by Nourse & Co. 11 Wall St. Cor. of Broad New York.

Ira Russell co Ft June 27th 1840

Friend Shaw & Lady

I now take the pen, to fulfill an engagement which I have too long neglected. But which I hope I shall be able to atone for by having somewhat replenished my stock of Log Cabin news (at least) — For here I send you a Butt of the old General a Log Cabin & a Barrel of Hard Cider — as a token of friendship a specimen of the times and especially the ^{Boys} Politics of the Green Mountain, in Vermont — Go it old tip!

*What there is one state (Vermont) back home is the Green Mountain which not only were but never will, bow to the Union of V.B.M.

I reached my native soil June 3rd in season to attend our county Whig convention and I will not attempt to describe ~~to date~~ the unusual glow which enthroned my feelings as I hove in sight of old Castleton, on there beholding congregated thousands, with high floating banners, containing the names of Harrison Tyler & reform. Yes numberless were the flags whose laconic but expressive mottoes, speak in language louder than thunder. *

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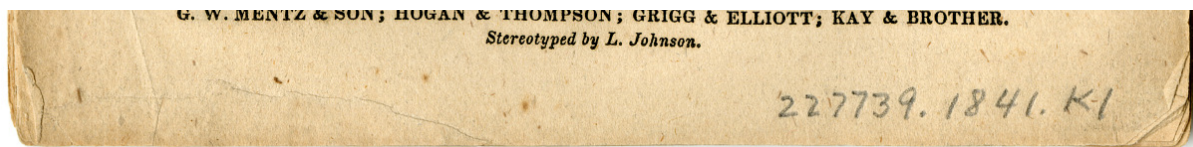
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND SERVICES OF GENERAL WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON; WITH TESTIMONIALS OF HIS CONDUCT AND CHARACTER BY OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT UNDER HIM AND WITH HIM, THE BATTLES OF THEIR COUNTRY, AT TIPPECANOE, FORT MEIGS, AND THE THAMES.

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Tippecanoe Almanac, 1841

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A critical remark made by a Democratic newspaperman gave birth to the log cabin and the hard cider barrel as Whig symbols to promote the candidacy of William Henry Harrison. The newspaperman wrote that Harrison's rivals could easily "get rid of" the old general with "a barrel of hard cider, and settle a pension of two thousand a year on him, and my word for it, he will sit the remainder of his days in his log cabin by the side of a 'sea coal' fire and study moral philosophy." Though the Democratic press reprinted the suggestion as a cutting remark, Harrison's Whig friends embraced the everyday attributes of log cabins and hard cider.



Thornwood cane with hard cider barrel head, 1840
Gift of Ralph E. Becker Collection of Political Americana

Axes

Use of the axe as a political symbol dates to the era of Congressman Davy Crockett (1786–1836). Like his fellow Whigs, Crockett recognized the political value of assuming a self-effacing personality. His partisans played along. The Young Men’s Whig Association of Philadelphia, for example, presented Crockett with this ceremonial silver, mahogany, and ivory-tipped hatchet in 1835. One side of its head is engraved, “Crockett.” The other side is engraved with his motto, “Go Ahead.”



Davy Crockett ceremonial hatchet, 1835
Transfer from U.S. Patent Office

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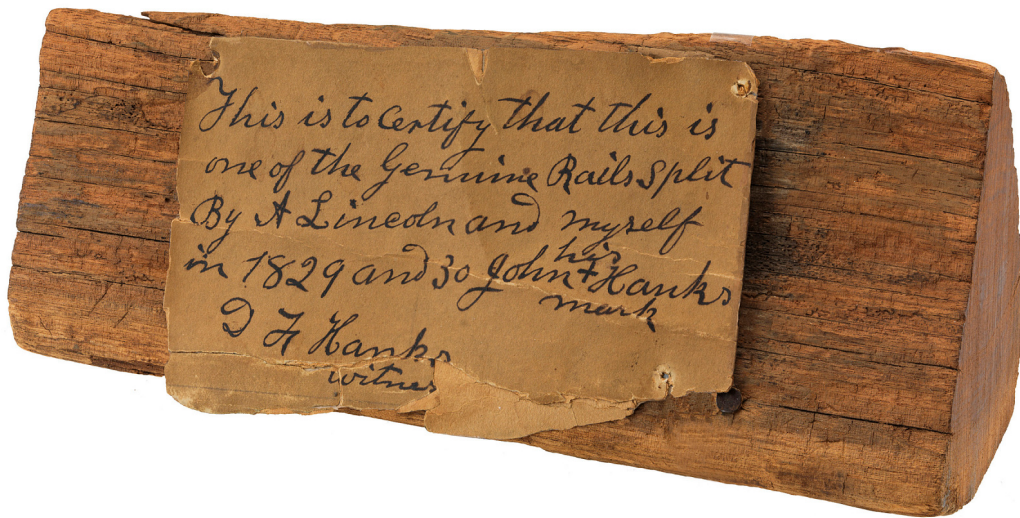


Lincoln parade axe, 1860

Gift of Ralph E. Becker Collection of Political Americana

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The closely contested election of 1860 generated mass entertainments such as “Wide Awake” torchlight parades staged on behalf of Republican presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln. Banners, badges, and ribbons proclaimed allegiance to the Constitution and the Union.



Lincoln fence rail

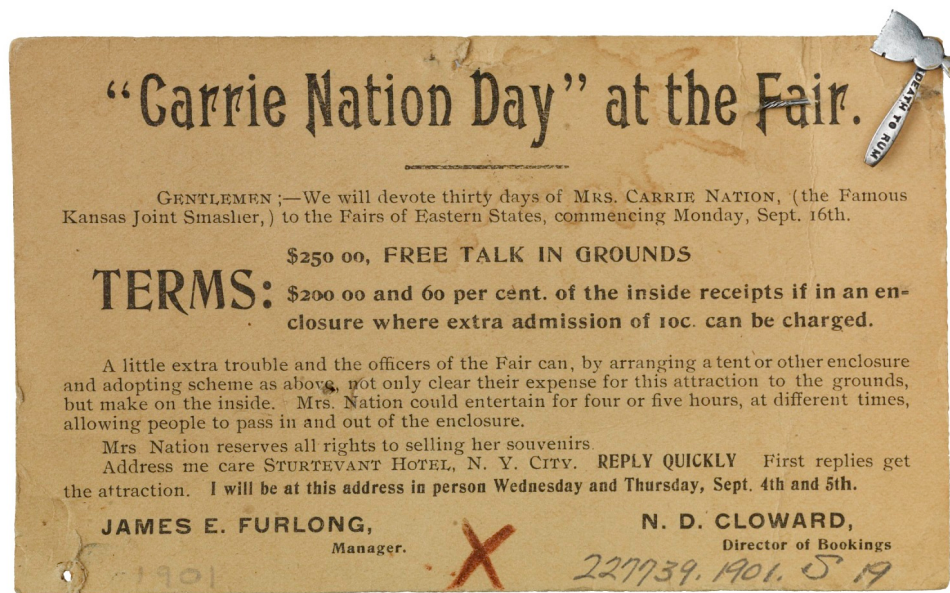
Gift of Estate of Leverett Saltonstall

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This fence-rail piece is one of many made for the friends of Abraham Lincoln. This piece from 1830 is attributed to Lincoln’s cousin and rail-splitting partner, John Hanks. Dennis F. Hanks (another cousin) sold it at the Northwest Soldiers’ Home Fair in Chicago in May 1865, a little more than a month after Lincoln’s assassination. Dennis Hanks wrote the label for each fence rail for his illiterate cousin John Hanks, who added his X as an affidavit. John Hanks was one of two men who had carried fence rails into the Illinois State Republican Convention that made Lincoln its presidential candidate in 1860. The imagery reversed Lincoln’s public persona, from the attorney he had become to the rail-mauling day laborer he had been.

Hatchetation

By her own account, temperance reformer Carry A. Nation used rocks, a sledgehammer borrowed from a blacksmith, and a bar room billiard ball to destroy five Kansas saloons—before she took up a hatchet to destroy a Wichita, Kansas, saloon on December 27, 1900. Saloons were illegal under Kansas state law, but tolerated by officials. Explaining her choice of weapon, Nation recalled that the state’s “liquor interests” had nothing to fear from the usual temperance advocates, “but they were not prepared for a furious woman and a hatchet.” Her saloon smashings became known as “hatchetations”—a play on words coined by the publicity-savvy Nation.



Postcard, "Carrie Nation Day at the Fair," 1901

Gift of Ralph E. Becker Collection of Political Americana

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Glass hatchet, "Carrie Nation Wyer," 1913

Gifts of Mr. Clay F. Gaumer and Ralph E. Becker Collection of Political Americana

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Carrie A. Nation pin, 1905
Gift of Mr. Clay F. Gaumer

[View object record </collections/nmah_512276>](/collections/nmah_512276)

A Topeka, Kansas, druggist supplied Nation with little pewter hatchets to sell to cover her legal fines and travel expenses. Nation found that the public clamored for her hatchet souvenirs and readily grasped the meaning of them.

Unexcitable Endurance

Though distancing themselves from Carry A. Nation's "hatchetations," the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and other organizations could hardly ignore the hatchet as a symbol of teetotaling activism and popular engagement. Somewhat at odds with this message, the hatchet's head is decorated with the emblem of a box turtle, an icon of dryly unexcitable endurance.



Wooden hatchet with doves and box turtle emblems, Woman's Christian Temperance Union, around 1910

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